

AN
ADDRESS,
TO THE
BENEFACTORS AND FRIENDS

OF THE
Free School Society of New-York,
DELIVERED ON THE
OPENING OF THAT INSTITUTION, IN THEIR
NEW AND SPACIOUS BUILDING,
ON THE
ELEVENTH OF THE TWELFTH MONTH (DECEMBER) 1809.

—●—
PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF THE TRUSTEES.
—●—

BY DE WITT CLINTON,
Mayor of the City of New-York, and President of the Society.

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NEW-YORK:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY COLLINS AND PERKINS, NO. 189,
PEARL-STREET.

.....
1810.

RESOLVED,

That the Vice-President and Secretary wait on the President, with the acknowledgments of the Board for his excellent and appropriate Address delivered this day, and that they request a copy of it for publication.

Extract from the minutes of the Trustees,

B. D. PERKINS, Secretary.

New-York, 12th Mo. 11th, 1809.

ADDRESS, &c.

ON an occasion so interesting to this institution, when it is about to assume a more respectable shape, and to acquire a spacious and permanent habitation, it is no more than a becoming mark of attention to its patrons, benefactors, and friends, assembled for the first time in this place, to delineate its origin, its progress, and its present situation. The station which I occupy in this association, and the request of my much respected colleagues, have devolved this task upon me—a task which I should perform with unmingled pleasure, if my avocations had afforded me time to execute it with fidelity. And I trust, that the humble objects of your bounty, presented this day to your view, will not detract from the solemnity of the occasion—"That ambition will not mock our useful toil, nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile the simple annals of the poor."

In casting a view over the civilized world, we find an universal accordance in opinion, on the benefits of education, but the practical exposition of this opinion, exhibits a deplorable contrast. While magnificent Colleges and Universities are erected, and endowed, and dedicated to literature, we behold few liberal appropriations for diffusing the blessings of knowledge among all descriptions of people. The fundamental error of Europe has been, to confine the light of knowledge to the wealthy and the great, while the humble and the depressed have been as sedulously excluded from its participation, as the wretched criminal, immured in a

dungeon, is from the light of Heaven. This cardinal mistake is not only to be found in the institutions of the old world, and in the condition of its inhabitants, but it is to be seen in most of the books which have been written on the subject of education. The celebrated Locke, whose treatises on government and the human understanding, have covered him with immortal glory, devoted the powers of his mighty intellect, to the elucidation of education—but in the very threshold of his book, we discover this radical error; his treatise is professedly intended for the children of gentlemen. “If those of that rank (says he) are by their education once set right, they will quickly bring all the rest in order;” and he appears to consider the education of other children as of little importance. The consequence of this monstrous heresy, has been, that ignorance, the prolific parent of every crime and vice, has predominated over the great body of the people, and a correspondent moral debasement has prevailed. “Man differs more from man, than man from beast,”* says a writer, once celebrated. This remark, however generally false, will certainly apply with great force to man in a state of high mental cultivation, and man in a state of extreme ignorance.

This view of human nature is indeed calculated to excite the most painful feelings, and it entirely originates from a consideration of the predominating error which I have exposed. To this source, must the crimes and the calamities of the old world be principally imputed. Ignorance is the cause as well as the effect of bad governments, and without the cultivation of our rational powers, we can entertain no just ideas of the obligations of morality or the excellencies of religion. Although England is justly renowned for its cultivation of the arts and sciences, and although the poor rates of that country exceed five millions sterling, per annum, yet (I adopt the words of an eminent British writer) “there is no Protestant Country where the education of the Poor has been so gross-

* Montaigne's Essays.

ly and infamously neglected as in England.”* If one tenth part of that sum had been applied to the education of the poor, the blessings of order, knowledge and innocence would have been diffused among them, the evil would have been attacked at the fountain head, and a total revolution would have taken place in the habits and lives of the people, favourable to the cause of industry, good morals, good order, and rational religion.

More just and rational views have been entertained on this subject in the United States. (Here, no privileged orders—no factitious distinctions in society—no hereditary nobility—no established religion—no royal prerogatives exist, to interpose barriers between the people, and to create distinct classifications in society. All men being considered as enjoying an equality of rights, the propriety and necessity of dispensing, without distinction, the blessings of education, followed of course. In New-England the greatest attention has been invariably given to this important object. In Connecticut, particularly, the Schools are supported at least three-fourths of the year by the interest of a very large fund created for that purpose, and a small tax on the people; the whole amounting to seventy-eight thousand dollars per annum. The result of this beneficial arrangement is obvious and striking. Our Eastern brethren are a well-informed and moral people. In those States it is as uncommon to find a poor man who cannot read and write, as it is rare to see one in Europe who can.

Pennsylvania has followed the noble example of New-England. On the fourth of April last, a law was passed in that state, entitled, “ an act to provide for the education of the poor, gratis.” The expense of educating them is made a county charge, and the county commissioners are directed to carry the law into execution.

New-York has proceeded in the same career, but on a different, and perhaps more eligible plan. For a few years back, a fund has been accumulating with great celerity, so-

* Edinburgh Review.

lemnly appropriated to the support of common schools. This fund consists at present of near four hundred thousand dollars in bank stock, mortgages and bonds; and produces an annual interest of upwards of twenty-four thousand dollars. The capital will be augmented by the accumulating interest and the sale of three hundred and thirty-six thousand acres of land. When the interest on the whole amounts to fifty thousand dollars, it will be in a state of distribution. It is highly probable that the whole fund will, in a few years, amount to twelve hundred and fifty thousand dollars, yielding a yearly income of seventy-five thousand dollars. If population is taken as the ratio of distribution, the quota of this city will amount to seven thousand five hundred dollars, a sum amply sufficient on the plan of our establishment, if judiciously applied, to accommodate all our poor with a gratuitous education.

On a comparison of the plan of this state with that of Pennsylvania, it will probably be found that we are entitled to the palm of superior excellence. Our capital is already created, and nothing more is requisite than a judicious distribution—whereas the expense of school establishments in that state, is to be satisfied by annual burdens. The people of Pennsylvania are therefore interested against a faithful execution of the plan, because the less that is applied to education, the less they will have to pay in taxation. Abuses and perversions will of course arise and multiply in the administration of the public bounty. And the laws of that state being liable to alteration or repeal, her system has not that permanency and stability to which ours can lay claim. It is true that our Legislature may divert this fund, but it would justly be considered a violation of public faith, and a measure of a very violent character. As long as the public sentiment is correct in this respect, we have no reason to apprehend that any Legislature will be hardy enough to encounter the odium of their constituents, and the indignation of posterity. And we have every reason to believe, that

this great fund, established for sinking vice and ignorance, will never be diverted or destroyed, but that it will remain unimpaired, and in full force and vigour to the latest posterity, as an illustrious establishment, erected by the benevolence of the state, for the propagation of knowledge, and the diffusion of virtue among the people.

A number of benevolent persons had seen, with concern, the increasing vices of this city, arising in a great degree from the neglected education of the poor. Great cities are at all times, the nurseries and hot-beds of crimes. Bad men from all quarters repair to them, in order to obtain the benefit of concealment, and to enjoy in a superior degree the advantages of rapine and fraud. And the dreadful examples of vice, which are presented to youth, and the alluring forms in which it is arrayed, connected with a spirit of extravagance and luxury, the never-failing attendant of great wealth and extensive business, cannot fail of augmenting the mass of moral depravity.—“In London, says a distinguished writer on its police, above twenty thousand individuals rise every morning, without knowing how, or by what means they are to be supported through the passing day, and in many instances even where they are to lodge on the ensuing night.”* There can be no doubt that hundreds are in the same situation in this city, prowling about our streets for prey, the victims of intemperance, the slaves of idleness, and ready to fall into any vice, rather than to cultivate industry and good order. How can it be expected that persons so careless of themselves, will pay any attention to their children? The mendicant parent bequeaths his squalid poverty to his offspring, and the hardened thief transmits a legacy of infamy to his unfortunate and depraved descendants. Instances have occurred of little children, arraigned at the bar of our criminal courts, who have been derelict and abandoned, without a hand to protect, or a voice to guide them, through life.—When in-

* Colquhoun on Police of London.

terrogated as to their connections, they have replied, that they were without home and without friends. In this state of turpitude and idleness, leading lives of roving mendicancy and petty depredation, they existed a burden and a disgrace to the community.

True it is, that Charity Schools, entitled to eminent praise, were established in this City, but they were attached to particular sects, and did not embrace children of different persuasions. Add to this, that some denominations were not provided with those establishments, and that children, the most in want of instruction, were necessarily excluded, by the irreligion of their parents, from the benefit of education.

After a full view of the case, those persons of whom I have spoken, agreed that the evil must be corrected at its source, and that education was the sovereign prescription. Under this impression, they petitioned the Legislature, who, agreeably to their application, passed a law on the 9th of April, 1805, entitled, "An act to incorporate the Society instituted in the City of New-York for the establishment of a Free School, for the education of poor children, who do not belong to, or are not provided for, by any religious society."—Thirteen Trustees were elected under this Act, on the first Monday of the ensuing May, with power to manage the affairs of the Corporation. On convening together, they found that they had undertaken a great task, and encountered an important responsibility; without funds, without teachers, without a house in which to instruct, and without a system of instruction; and that their only reliance must be on their own industry, on the liberality of the public, on the bounty of the constituted authorities, and the smiles of the Almighty Dispenser of all good.

In the year 1798, an obscure man of the name of Joseph Lancaster, possessed of an original genius and a most sagacious mind, and animated by a sublime benevolence, devoted himself to the education of the poor of Great-Britain.

Wherever he turned his eyes, he saw the deplorable state to which they were reduced by the prevalence of ignorance and vice. He first planted his standard of charity in the city of London, where it was calculated that forty thousand children were left as destitute of instruction as the savages of the desert. And he proceeded, by degrees, to form and perfect a system, which is in education what the most finished machines for abridging labour and expence are in the mechanic arts.

It comprehends reading, writing, arithmetic and the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures.—It arrives at its object with the least possible trouble and at the least possible expence. Its distinguishing characters are economy, facility and expedition, and its peculiar improvements are cheapness, activity, order and emulation. It is impossible on this occasion to give a detailed view of the system. For this I refer you to a publication entitled “improvements in education &c. by Joseph Lancaster,” and for its practical exposition, I beg you to look at the operations of this seminary. Reading, in all its processes, from the alphabet upwards, is taught at the same time with writing, commencing with sand, proceeding to the slate, and from thence to the copy-book. And to borrow a most just and striking remark, “The beauty of the system is, that nothing is trusted to the boy himself—he does not only *repeat* the lesson before a superior, but he *learns* before a superior.”* Solitary study does not exist in the establishment. The children are taught in companies.—Constant habits of attention and vigilance are formed, and an ardent spirit of emulation kept continually alive. Instruction is performed through the instrumentality of the Scholars.—The School is divided into classes of ten, and a chief, denominated a Monitor, is appointed over each class, who exercises a didactic and supervisional authority. The discipline of the School is enforced by shame, rather than by the infliction of pain.—The

* Edinburgh Review.

punishments are varied with circumstances; and a judicious distribution of rewards, calculated to engage the infant mind in the discharge of its duty, forms the keystone which binds together the whole edifice.

Upon this system, Lancaster superintended in person a School of one thousand scholars, at an annual expence of three hundred pounds sterling. In 1806, he proposed, by establishing twenty or thirty Schools in different parts of the Kingdom, to educate ten thousand poor children, at four shillings per annum each.—This proposition has been carried into effect, and he has succeeded in establishing twenty Schools in different parts of the kingdom, all of which are under the care of Teachers, educated by him, few of whom are more than 18 years old. Several of the Schools have each about 300 scholars—that at Manchester has 400—his great school in Borough-Road, London, flourishes very much—it has sometimes 1100 Children—seldom less than 1000.

When I perceive that many boys in our school have been taught to read and write in two months, who did not before know the Alphabet, and that even one has accomplished it in three weeks—when I view all the bearings and tendencies of this system—when I contemplate the habits of order which it forms, the spirit of emulation which it excites—the rapid improvement which it produces—the purity of morals which it inculcates—when I behold the extraordinary union of celerity in instruction, and economy of expence—and when I perceive one great assembly of a thousand children, under the eye of a single teacher, marching with unexampled rapidity, and with perfect discipline, to the goal of knowledge, I confess that I recognize in Lancaster, the benefactor of the human race—I consider his system as creating a new æra in education, as a blessing sent down from Heaven to redeem the poor and distressed of this world from the power and dominion of ignorance.

Although the merits of this apostle of benevolence have

been generally acknowledged in his own country, and he has received the countenance and protection of the first men in Great-Britain, yet calumny has lifted up her voice against him, and attempts have been made to rob him of his laurels. Danger to the established Church and to government, has been apprehended from his endeavours to pour light upon mankind. This insinuation has been abundantly repelled by the tenor of his life—his carefully steering clear in his instructions of any peculiar creed, and his confining himself to the general truths of Christianity.—“ I have, says Lancaster, been eight years engaged in the benevolent work of superintending the education of the poor—I have had three thousand children, who owe their education to me, some of whom have left school, are apprenticed or in place, and are going on well.—I have had great influence with both parents and children, among whom there is, nevertheless, no one instance of a convert to my religious profession.” That knowledge is the parent of sedition and insurrection, and that in proportion as the public mind is illuminated, the principles of anarchy are disseminated, is a proposition that can never admit of debate, at least in this country.

But Lancaster has also been accused of arrogating to himself surreptitious honours, and attempts have been made to transfer the entire merit of his great discovery to Dr. Bell. Whatever he borrowed from that gentleman, he has candidly acknowledged. The use of sand, in teaching, undoubtedly came to him through that channel, but it has been practised for ages, by the Brahmins. He may also be indebted to Bell for some other improvements, but the vital leading principles of his system, are emphatically an original discovery.

The Trustees of this institution, after due deliberation, did not hesitate to adopt the system of Lancaster, and in carrying it into effect, they derived essential aid from one of their body, who had seen it practised in England, and who

had had personal communication with its author. A teacher was also selected who has fully answered every reasonable expectation. He has generally followed the prescribed plan. Wherever he has deviated, he has improved. A more numerous, a better governed school, affording equal facilities to improvement, is not to be found in the United States.

Provided thus with an excellent system and an able teacher, the school was opened on the sixth of May, 1806, in a small apartment in Bancker-Street. This was the first scion of the Lancaster stock engrafted in the United States ; and from this humble beginning, in the course of little more than three years, you all observe the rapidity with which we have ascended.

One great desideratum still remained to be supplied. Without sufficient funds, nothing could be efficiently done. Animated appeals were made to the bounty of our citizens, and five thousand six hundred and forty-eight dollars were collected by subscription.—Application was also made to the Legislature of this State for assistance, and on the 27th of February, 1807, a law was passed, appropriating four thousand dollars, for the “purpose of erecting a suitable building, or buildings, for the instruction of poor children, and every year thereafter, the sum of one thousand dollars, for the purpose of promoting the benevolent objects of the society.” The preamble of this liberal act, contains a legislative declaration of the excellence of the Lancaster system, in the following words:—“Whereas the Trustees of the Society for establishing a Free-School in the city of New-York, for the education of such poor children as do not belong to, or are not provided for, by any religious society, have, by their memorial, solicited the aid of the legislature ; and whereas their plan of extending the benefits of education to poor children, and the excellent mode of instruction adopted by them, are highly deserving of the encouragement of Government.”

Application was also made to the Corporation of the City for assistance, and the tenement in Bancker-Street, being in all respects, inadequate to the accommodation of the increasing establishment, that body appropriated a building adjacent to the Alms-House, for the temporary accommodation of the school, and the sum of five hundred dollars towards putting it in repair; the society agreeing to receive and educate fifty children from the Alms-House. To this place the school was removed on the first of May, 1807, where it has continued until to-day.

The Corporation also presented the ground of this edifice, on which was an arsenal, to the Society, on condition of their educating the children of the Alms-House gratuitously; and also the sum of fifteen hundred dollars to aid in the completion of this building. The value of this lot, and the old building, may be fairly estimated at ten thousand dollars; and the Society have expended above thirteen thousand dollars in the erection and completion of this edifice and the adjacent buildings. The income of the school, during the last year, has been about sixteen hundred dollars, and its expence did not differ much from that sum. This room will contain near six hundred scholars, and below there are apartments for the family of the teacher, for the meeting of the trustees, and for a female school, which may contain one hundred scholars, and may be considered as an useful adjunct to this institution. This seminary was established about twelve years ago by a number of young women belonging to, or professing with, the society of Friends, who have, with meritorious zeal and exemplary industry, devoted much of their personal attention, and all their influence, to the education of poor girls in the elementary parts of education and needle-work. The signal success which attended this free-school animated the trustees with a desire to extend its usefulness, and to render it co-extensive with the wants of the community, and commensurate with the objects of public bounty. A statute was accordingly passed,

on their application, on the first of April, 1808, altering the style of this corporation, denominating it "The Free-School Society of New-York," and extending its powers to all children who are the proper objects of a gratuitous education.

From this elevation of prosperity and this fruition of philanthropy, the Society had the satisfaction of seeing that the wise and the good of this, and the neighbouring States, had turned their attention to their establishment. A number of Ladies of this City, distinguished for their consideration in Society, and honoured and respected for their undeviating cultivation of the charities of life, established a Society for the very humane, charitable and laudable purposes of protecting, relieving, and instructing Orphan Children. This institution was incorporated on the 7th of April, 1807, under the style of "The Orphan Asylum Society in the city of New-York," and at a subsequent period, the Legislature, under a full conviction of its great merits and claims to public patronage, made a disposition in its favour, which will, in process of time, produce five thousand dollars.

A large building, fifty feet square and three stories high, has been erected, for its accommodation, in the suburbs of the city, and it now contains seventy children, who are supported by the zeal and benevolence of its worthy members, and educated on the plan of this institution, at an annual expence of two thousand dollars.

An economical School, whose principal object is the instruction of the Children of the Refugees from the W. Indies, was opened some time since in this city, where, in addition to the elementary parts of education, Grammar, History, Geography, and the French Language, are taught. It is conducted on the plan of Lancaster, with modifications and extensions, and is patronized and cherished by French and American gentlemen, of great worth and respectability, who are entitled to every praise for their benevolence. Children of either sex are admitted, without distinction of nation, religion, or fortune. This Seminary is in a flourishing condi-

tion, and contains two hundred scholars. There are two masters in this Seminary, and two women who teach Needle Work, and there is a Printing Press, where such as have any talents in that way, are taught that important art.

We have also the satisfaction of seeing the benefits of this system extended, either in whole or in part, to the Charity Schools of the Dutch, Episcopal, and Methodist Churches, and of the Presbyterian Church in Rutgers' street; and also to the School founded by the Manumission Society, for the education of the people of colour, which has, in consequence of this amelioration, been augmented from seventy to one hundred and thirty children.

In Philadelphia the same laudable spirit has been manifested. Two deputations from that city have visited us, for the express purpose of examining our school. One of these made so favourable a report on their return, that a number of the more enterprising and benevolent citizens, composed of members belonging to the Society of Friends, immediately associated under the name of the "Adelphi Society," and raised, by private subscription, a sum sufficient to purchase a suitable lot of ground, to erect a handsome two story brick building, seventy-five feet in length, and thirty-five in breadth, in which they formed two spacious rooms. The Adelphi School now contains two hundred Children, under the care of one teacher, and is eminently prosperous. The other deputation made also a favourable report, and "the Philadelphia Free School Society," an old and respectable institution, adopted, in consequence, our system, where it flourishes beyond expectation.

Two female schools, one called the "Aimwell School," in Philadelphia, and another in Burlington, New-Jersey, have also embraced our plan with equal success.

I trust that I shall be pardoned for this detail.—The origin and progress of beneficial discoveries cannot be too minutely specified; and when their diffusion can only be exceeded by their excellence, we have peculiar reason to con-

gratulate the friends of humanity. This prompt and general encouragement is honourable to our national character, and shews conclusively, that the habits, manners and opinions of the American People, are favourable to the reception of truth and the propagation of knowledge.—And no earthly consideration could induce the benevolent man, to whom we are indebted for what we see this day, to exchange his feelings, if from the obscure mansions of indigence, in which, in all human probability he now is, instilling comfort into the hearts, and infusing knowledge into the minds of the poor, he could hear the voice of a great and enlightened people pronouncing his eulogium, and see this parent seminary, and the establishments which have sprung from its bosom, diffusing light, imparting joy, and dispensing virtue. His tree of knowledge is indeed transplanted to a more fertile soil, and a more congenial clime. It has flourished with uncommon vigour and beauty—its luxuriant and wide-spreading branches afford shelter to all who require it—its ambrosial fragrance fills the land—and its head reaches the Heavens!

Far be it from my intention to prevent future exertion. For although much has been done, yet much remains to do, to carry into full effect the system. It would be improper to conceal from you, that in order to finish this edifice, we have incurred a considerable debt, which our ordinary income cannot extinguish; and that therefore we must repose ourselves on the public beneficence. It has been usual to supply the more indigent children with necessaries to protect them against the inclemencies of winter; for without this provision, their attendance would be utterly impracticable. This has hitherto been accomplished by the bounty of individuals, and to no other source can we at present appeal with success.

The law from which we derive our corporate existence, does not confine us to one seminary, but contemplates the establishment of schools. A restriction to a single institution

would greatly impair our usefulness, and would effectually discourage those exertions which are necessary, in order to spread knowledge among all the indigent.

Col. Henry Rutgers, with his characteristic benevolence, has made a donation of two lots in Henry-street, worth at least twenty-five hundred dollars, to this Corporation.— By a condition contained in one of the deeds, it is necessary that we should erect a School-House by June, 1811, and it is highly proper, without any reference to the condition, that this should be accomplished as soon as possible, in order to meet the wants of the indigent in that populous part of the City. If some charitable and public-spirited citizen would follow up this beneficence, and make a similar conveyance on the opposite side of the City, and if the liberality of the public shall dispense the means of erecting the necessary buildings, then the exigencies of all our poor, with respect to education, would be amply supplied for a number of years.

After our youth are instructed in the elements of useful knowledge, it is indispensable to their future usefulness, that some calling should be marked out for them. As most of them will undoubtedly be brought up in useful trades, pecuniary means to facilitate their progress to this object, would, if properly applied, greatly redound to the benefit of the individual as well as to the good of the community.

In such an extensive and comprehensive establishment, we are to expect, according to the course of human events, that children of extraordinary genius and merit will rise up, entitled to extraordinary patronage. To select such from the common mass—to watch over their future destiny—to advance them through all the stages of education and through all the grades of knowledge, and to settle them in useful and honourable professions, are duties of primary importance and indispensable obligation. This, however, will require considerable funds—but of what estimation are pecuniary sacrifices when put in the scale against the important benefits that may result: and if we could draw aside the veil of

futurity, perhaps we might see in the offspring of this establishment, so patronized and so encouraged, characters that will do honour to human nature—that will have it in their power—

The applause of list'ning Senates to command,
The threats of pain and ruin to despise;
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling Land,
And read their hist'ry in a nation's eyes.

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[*Monthly Register and Review of the U. States*, vol. 11. p. 308.]

The Directors of the American Academy of Arts, in adjudging a gold medal for one of the Engravings in this

Work, addressed, through the medium of Col. *Trumbull*, one of the Board, the following remarks to the Publishers :

" I am charged, gentlemen, to convey to you the expression of the high satisfaction with which the Directors viewed these specimens of rapid improvement in the art of Engraving. Judging from this first exhibition, they cannot but indulge the hope of soon seeing this branch of the polite arts carried to a degree of perfection in America, which shall excite the surprise and even the emulation of Europe."

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The following is an extract of a letter from *Lindley Murray*, dated sixth Mo. (June) 1807.

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